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Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* United Nations secures agreement on safe passage for Croatian Serbs out of Sector North; situation in Sector East appears to be stabilizing.

* Rwanda says exiled military elements are preparing to launch cross-border attack from refugee camps in Zaire; Security Council should exempt Rwandese Government from arms embargo.

* On International Day of World's Indigenous Peoples, Secretary-General says indigenous peoples need more access to decision-making processes at national and international levels.

* Subcommission on Minorities expresses grave concern at massive violations of human rights of civilians in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

* Assembly of International Seabed Authority begins final part of first session in Kingston; President urges early agreement on composition of Council.

* Major-General Phillip Sibanda of Zimbabwe to succeed Major-General Chris Garuba of Nigeria as UNAVEM III Force Commander.

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The United Nations today secured an agreement providing safe passage out of Sector North for up to 45,000 Croatian Serbs, according to a spokesman for the Organization. Before leaving the Sector, Serb soldiers must turn over all weapons from rifles to tanks at United Nations collection points at Glina and Topusko. The first batch of 1,000 refugees left Topusko this afternoon, bound for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) via the Zagreb-Belgrade highway.

Some 15,000 refugees had been trapped by heavy fighting in the town of Dvor, but the situation there was quiet this afternoon, the spokesman said. All Serb fighters in the area were thought to have escaped into Bosnia. Meanwhile, the Bosnian Army's Fifth Corps was pulling back from Croatian territory. Yesterday, United Nations peace-keepers saw two MiG-21 aircraft flying over Dvor and heard explosions. Eight minutes before, two armed MiGs were seen taking off from Pleso airbase near Zagreb.

(more)

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The refugee exodus from Sector South was almost complete, the spokesman noted, although 800 Serbs remained at the United Nations compound in Knin. Negotiations were underway for their safe passage, but Croatian officials were insisting on interrogating all males in the compound and the United Nations would not accept that condition. The situation in Sector East appeared to be stabilizing, despite sporadic shelling and small-arms fire today.

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Rwanda's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Manzi Bakuramutsa, today said that exiled elements of the former Rwandese military were preparing to attack his country from refugee camps in Zaire. He told correspondents at Headquarters that those elements were receiving external assistance and were preventing refugees from returning home. The mandatory arms embargo imposed by Security Council resolution 918 (1994) should be strengthened, but should not apply to his Government. It needed weapons to defend Rwanda, not to attack other countries or its own population.

Mr. Bakuramutsa said his Government would welcome Rwandese refugees returning from the camps, but those who had committed genocide must be brought to justice. He stressed that reconciliation and genocide did not go together -- justice had to come first. Every action taken by the Government was transparent and in good faith, he added.

The international community was tired of trying to help Rwandese refugees because it had not found a solution to the problem, he went on to say. It had withdrawn from Somalia because there had been no solution there, and was ready to withdraw from Liberia for the same reason.

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Indigenous peoples need enhanced access to decision-making processes at the national and international levels, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In a message on the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous People, he said laws and programmes were needed to help solve

the problems they faced, and to allow them to celebrate their traditions, talent and diversity. Describing indigenous peoples as a precious asset, he underlined the importance of supporting their struggle for rights and opportunities.

The International Day of the World's Indigenous People was celebrated for the first time today, in the first year of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (1995-2004). The celebration also coincided with the United Nations Year for Tolerance and the Organization's fiftieth anniversary.

(more)

The Day was marked at Headquarters by a "sacred pipe" ceremony, with songs and dances honouring indigenous peoples. The main theme of the ceremony was "Sharing a Vision of Peace".

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The Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities has unanimously adopted a resolution expressing grave concern at the massive violations of the human rights of civilians in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It decided to transmit the resolution immediately to the Secretary-General, and called on him urgently to take all necessary measures to stop those violations and secure the human rights of the Bosnian people.

The Subcommission also expressed solidarity with, and support of, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, former Special Rapporteur on human rights in the former Yugoslavia. It cited "his moral and courageous stand and his resignation in protest of the perpetuation of gross violations in Bosnia and Herzegovina".

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The Assembly of the International Seabed Authority has begun the third and final part of its first session in Kingston, Jamaica, hearing an appeal by its President to resolve problems relating to the composition of the Authority's Council. President Hasjim Djalal (Indonesia), reporting on inter-sessional consultations he held in New York in May, said those problems could be overcome through compromise. Consultations revealed a trend towards general agreement in certain areas, while an exchange of views would facilitate mutual understanding in others.

The Council will consist of 36 members from five groups of States. Membership will reflect four main elements: States with a special interest in deep seabed mining of minerals, such as large producers of those minerals; pioneer investors in seabed activities; developing countries with special needs, such as land-locked countries; and an equitable geographical representation.

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The Secretary-General has appointed Major-General Phillip Valerio Sibanda of Zimbabwe as the next Force Commander of the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM III). He will replace Major-General Chris Abutu Garuba of Nigeria, who will complete his tour of duty with the Mission on 1 October and return to national service. Major-General Sibanda is expected to arrive at his duty station in Angola in the second half of September.

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